

CONGRESSMAN SHERWOOD BOEHLERT (R-NY)
OPENING STATEMENT FOR NANOTECHNOLOGY HEARING
November 17, 2005

I want to welcome everyone to this important hearing on the environmental and safety implications of nanotechnology – an issue that is likely to get increasing public attention over the next several years. But it's a matter that has already claimed the attention of this Committee for some time.

As I think everyone knows, the Science Committee has been a leader in pushing the federal government to invest in nanotechnology and in creating the statutory structure to be sure that we stay focused on nanotechnology research and development (R&D) in a productive way. And our National Nanotechnology Research and Development Act, which the President signed four years ago, made it clear that nanotechnology R&D had to include research on the environmental implications of the technology – not as a sideline, but as a fundamental, integrated part of the research program. And we have been watching closely to make sure that happens.

The need for more research on the environmental and safety aspects of nanotechnology is made amply clear by our non-governmental witnesses this morning, who speak in their written testimony with remarkable unity. Their message is clear and must be heeded: if nanotechnology is to fulfill its enormous economic potential, then we have to invest more right now in understanding what problems the technology might cause.

This is the time to act – before we cause problems. This is the time to act – when there is a consensus among government, industry and environmentalists. As Mr. Rejeski says in his testimony this is our chance to “get it right” – to learn from past mistakes we made with new technologies.

The writer Kurt Vonnegut once defined the “information revolution” as the idea that people could actually know what they’re talking about, if they really want to. That’s exactly the kind of information revolution we need in nanotechnology.

I’m pleased to say that the Administration also seems to feel that way, as Dr. Teague will describe this morning. But we need an even greater commitment from the Administration on this issue. We will be closely reviewing the so-called “framework” on this matter that is due out early next year as well as the fiscal 2007 budget request due out in February to ensure that funding is adequate.

So let me close by thanking our witnesses at the outset for the excellent, clear and persuasive testimony they have prepared for today’s hearing. This is exactly the kind of hearing that the Science Committee should be having – and that only we are likely to have – that is, bringing attention to an important issue before it becomes a crisis, before it becomes hopelessly polarized, before all the debate becomes depressingly predictable.

So I look forward to today’s hearing, and I promise you that we will continue to press forward with this issue.